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THE ANDHRA PRADESH GAZETTE
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NOTIFICATIONS BY HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS, Etc.

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HIGH COURT OF ANDHRA PRADESH AT AMARAVATI

ROC.NO.81 / SO / 2020.

DATED: 14-10-2022.

LETTER DATED: 22.01.2022 OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL, SUPREME COURT OF INDIA - FORWARDED COPY OF JUDGMENT DATED: 11.01.2022 PASSED BY THE HON'BLE SUPREME COURT IN MISCELLANEOUS APPLICATION NO.1852 OF 2019 TITLED 'SMRUTI TUKARAM BADADE Vs. STATE OF MAHARASHTRA & ANR.' FOR NECESSARY COMPLIANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION - "GUIDELINES FOR RECORDING OF EVIDENCE OF VULNERABLE WITNESSES IN CRIMINAL MATTERS" FRAMED.

NOTIFICATION No. 11 / SO / 2022

Guidelines for Recording of Evidence of Vulnerable Witnesses in Criminal Matters

In exercise of the powers conferred by Article 227 of the Constitution of India, the Hon'ble the Chief Justice is pleased to frame the following guidelines for **Recording of Evidence of Vulnerable Witnesses in Criminal Matters**

**GUIDELINES FOR RECORDING EVIDENCE OF
VULNERABLE WITNESSES IN CRIMINAL MATTERS****PREAMBLE**

The purpose of this protocol is to present guidelines and mandatory recommendations, to improve the response of the justice dispensation system to vulnerable witnesses.

This protocol prescribes guidelines while recording depositions of vulnerable witnesses in order to enable them to give their best evidence in criminal proceedings. Each witness is unique and is to be handled accordingly. Some of the most challenging cases handled by judges during the course of their careers are those involving vulnerable witnesses as, what happened to or was witnessed by them, impact significantly on their quality of deposition and potentially outcome of a trial.

Vulnerable witnesses, find the criminal justice system intimidating, particularly the courtroom experience. Under these circumstances, a vulnerable witness may be a poor witness, providing weak testimony and contributing less information than should have been elicited. Further, the lengthy process of navigating the formal and adversarial criminal justice system can affect the vulnerable witnesses psychological development and disable this sensitivity in significant and long-lasting ways.

To respond effectively to the needs of vulnerable witnesses the criminal justice system needs to respond proactively with sensitivity in an enabling and age appropriate manner, so that the trial process is less traumatic for them. Judges have to strike a balance between protecting the accused's right to a fair trial, and ensuring that witnesses who give evidence in the case are enabled to do so, to the best of their ability.

(The UN Model Law on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna, UN, New York 2009 has provided valuable insight and has been a major reference in formulating these guidelines and to enable compliance with international standards on the subject.)

OBJECTIVES OF THESE GUIDELINES

1. To elicit and secure complete, accurate and reliable evidence from vulnerable witnesses;
2. To minimize harm or secondary victimization of vulnerable witnesses in anticipation and as a result of participation in the criminal justice system;
3. To ensure that the accused's right to a fair trial is maintained.

APPLICABILITY

Unless otherwise provided, these guidelines shall govern the examination of vulnerable witnesses during criminal trial who are victims or witnesses to crime.

1. Short Title, extent and commencement:

These guidelines shall be called, "Guidelines for recording evidence of vulnerable witnesses in criminal matters".

They shall apply to every criminal court in Andhra Pradesh.

Their application shall commence from the date notified by the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

2. Construction of the guidelines:

These guidelines shall be liberally construed to uphold the interests of vulnerable witnesses and to promote their maximum accommodation without prejudice to the right of the accused to a fair trial.

3. Definitions:

A. Vulnerable Witness-

- a. **Vulnerable Witness** - For the purpose of these guidelines, "vulnerable witness" means and includes-

- (i) any child victim or witness who has not completed 18 years of age,
- (ii) any victim of an offence under the POCSO Act, 2012,
- (iii) any victim of an offence under Sections 376(1), 376(2), 376A, 376AB, 376B, 376C, 376D, 376DA, 376DB, 376E, 354, 354A, 354B, 354C, 354D and 377 of the Indian Penal Code;
- (iv) any person with disability as defined under Section 2(s) of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 and considered to be a vulnerable witness by the concerned court;
- (v) any witness suffering from "mental illness" as defined under Section 2(s) of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 read with Section 118 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872;
- (vi) any witness deemed to have a threat perception under the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 of the Union Government as approved by the Supreme Court in *Mahender Chawla v. Union of India*¹; and
- (vii) any other witness deemed to be vulnerable by the concerned court², [including Family courts, Children's Courts, Juvenile Justice Board, civil and criminal courts, or any tribunal or forum].
- (viii) Age neutral victims of sexual assault read with Sections 273 and 327 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
- (ix) Any speech or hearing impaired individual or a person suffering from any other disability who is considered to be a vulnerable witness by the competent court.

B. Support Person - Means and includes guardian *ad litem*, legal aid lawyer, facilitators, interpreters, translators and any other person appointed by court or any other person appointed by the court to provide support and accompany the vulnerable witness to testify or attend judicial proceedings.

C. Best Interests of the Child - Means circumstances and conditions most congenial to security, protection of the child and most encouraging to his physical, psychological and emotional development and shall also include available alternative for safeguarding the growth and development of the child³.

D. Development Level - Development level refers to the specific growth phase in which most individual are expected to behave and function in relation to the advancement of their physical, socio economical, cognitive and moral abilities⁴.

¹ (2019)14 SCC 615

² Smruthi Tukaram Badade v. State of Maharashtra 2022 LiveLaw (SC) 80; Sakshi v Union of India, AIR 2004 SC 3566 para 34.

³ Section 327 (2) Cr.P.C

⁴ Sec.228 A IPC. Sec 21 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000

E. In-Camera Proceedings - Means criminal matters or part thereof wherein the public and press are not allowed to participate, for good reason as adjudged by the court.

F. Concealment of Identity of witness - Means and includes any condition prohibiting publication of the name, address and other particulars which may lead to the identification of the witnesses⁵.

G. Comfort Items – Comfort items mean any article which shall have a calming effect on a vulnerable witness at the time of deposition and may include stuffed toy, blanket or book.

H. Court House Tour - A pre-trial tour of court room to familiarize a vulnerable witnesses with the environment and the basic process of adjudication and roles of each court official⁶.

I. Live Link – ‘Live link’ means and *includes* a live television link, audio-video electronic means or other arrangement whereby a witness, while absent from the courtroom⁷ is nevertheless present in the court room by remote communication using technology to give evidence and be cross-examined.

J. Special Measures - mean and include the use of any mode, method and instrument, etc, considered necessary for providing assistance in recording deposition of vulnerable witnesses.

K. Testimonial Aids - means and includes screens; live links, image and/or voice altering devices; or any other technical devices.

L. Secondary Victimization - means victimization that occurs not as a direct result of a criminal act but through the response of institutions and individuals to the victim.

M. Revictimization - means a situation in which a person suffers more than one criminal incident over a period of time.

⁵ Sec.228 A IPC. Sec 21 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000

⁶ Alternative pre-trial and trial processes for child witnesses in New Zealand’s criminal justice system, Issue Paper, min. of Justice, New Zealand Gov.2010

⁷ Sec.275 Cr.P.C. Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings; Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses; CJSHI; UK

N. **Waiting Room** - A safe place for vulnerable witnesses where they can wait. It shall have toys, books, TV, etc., which can help them lower their anxiety⁸.

4. **Special Measures Direction** - The court shall direct as to which, special measure will be used to assist a particular eligible witness in providing the best evidence. Directions may be discharged or varied during the proceedings, but normally continue in effect until the proceedings are concluded, thus enabling the witness to know what assistance to expect.

5. **Applicability of guidelines to all vulnerable witnesses** - For the avoidance of doubt, it is made clear that these guidelines are to apply to any vulnerable witness including a child party, regardless of which party is seeking to examine the witness.

6. **No adverse inference to be drawn from special measures** - The fact that a witness has had the benefit of a special measure to assist them in deposition, shall not be regarded in any way whatsoever as being adverse to the position of the other side and this should be made clear by the judge at the time of passing order in terms of these guidelines to the parties when the vulnerable witness is examined and when the final judgment is pronounced.

7. **Identification of Stress causing factors of adversarial Criminal Justice System –**

Factors which cause stress on vulnerable witness, rendering them further vulnerable witnesses, and impeding complete disclosure by them shall, amongst others, include:

- (i) Multiple depositions and not using developmentally appropriate language.
- (ii) Delays and continuances.
- (iii) Testifying more than once.
- (iv) Prolonged/protracted court proceedings.
- (v) Lack of communication between professionals including police, doctors, lawyers, prosecutors, investigators, psychologists, etc.
- (vi) Fear of public exposure.
- (vii) Lack of understanding of complex legal procedures.
- (viii) Face - to - face contact with the accused
- (ix) Practices are insensitive to developmental needs.
- (x) Inappropriate cross-examination.

⁸ Alternative pre-trial and trial processes for child witnesses in New Zealand

- (xi) Lack of adequate support and victims services.
- (xii) Sequestration of witnesses who may be supportive to the child.
- (xiii) Placement that exposes the child to intimidation, pressure, or continued abuse.
- (xiv) Inadequate preparation for fearless and robust testifying.
- (xv) Worry about not being believed especially when there is no evidence other than the testimony of the vulnerable witness.
- (xvi) Formality of court proceedings and surroundings including formal dress of members of the judiciary and legal personnel⁹.

8. Competency of vulnerable witness:-

(i) Every vulnerable witness shall be presumed to be qualified as a witness unless prevented by the following-

(a) age

(b) physical or mental disability leading to recording a finding of doubt regarding the ability of such witness to perceive, remember, communicate, distinguish, truth from falsehood or appreciate the duty to tell the truth, and/or to express the same.

Explanation : The court shall conduct a competency examination before recording the testimony of such witness, or on an application of either prosecution or defence or *suo motu*¹⁰.

9. Persons allowed at competence assessment- Only the following are allowed to attend the competence assessment:

- (i) the judge and such court personnel deemed necessary and specified by order of the judge concerned;
- (ii) the counsel for the parties
- (iii) the guardian *ad litem*;
- (iv) one or more support persons for the child; and
- (v) the accused, unless the court determines that competence requires to be and can be fully evaluated in his absence.
- (vi) Any other person, who in the opinion of the Court can assist in the competence assessment.

10. Conduct of competence assessment: The assessment of a vulnerable witness as to his competence as a witness shall be conducted only by the judge.

11. Developmentally appropriate questions: The questions asked to assess competency of the vulnerable witness shall be appropriate to the age and developmental level of the child (and other vulnerable witness), shall not be related to the issues at trial, and shall focus on the ability of the vulnerable

⁹ Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Recommendations to improve the Criminal Justice Response to Child Victims and Witnesses, US Dept. of Justice.

¹⁰ (a) Section 118 Evidence Act (b) Ratan Singh Vs. State, AIR 2004 SC 23 and (c) Virender Vs. State – full reference CrI.A. No.121/08 decided on 29.09.09.

witness to remember, communicate, distinguish between truth and falsehood, and appreciate the duty to testify truthfully.

12. Continuing duty to assess competence- The court has the duty of continuously assessing the competence of the vulnerable witnesses throughout their testimony and to pass appropriate orders, as and when deemed necessary.

13. Pre-trial visit of Witnesses to the Court – Vulnerable witness shall be allowed a pre trial court visit along with the support person to enable such witnesses to familiarize themselves with the layout of the court and may include visit to and explanation of the following:

- (i) the location of the accused in the dock;
- (ii) court officials (what their roles are and where they sit);
- (iii) who else might be in the court, for example those in the public gallery;
- (iv) the location of the witness box
- (v) a run-through of basic court procedure;
- (vi) the facilities available in the court;
- (vii) discussion of any particular fears or concerns with the intermediaries, prosecutors and the judge to dispel the fear, trauma and anxiety in connection with the prospective deposition at court.
- (viii) demonstration of any special measures applied for and/or granted, for example practising on the live link and explaining who will be able to see them in the courtroom and showing the use of screens (where it is practical and convenient to do so)¹¹.

14. Meeting the Judge –

The Judge may meet a vulnerable witness *suo motu* on reasons to be recorded or on an application of either party in the presence of the prosecution and defence lawyer or in their absence before they give evidence, for explaining the court process in order to help them in understanding the procedure and giving their best evidence.

15. Appointment of Guardian *ad litem*-

The court may appoint any person as guardian *ad litem* as per law to a witness who is a victim, or a witness to a crime having regard to his best interests after considering the background of the guardian *ad litem* and his familiarity with the judicial process, social service programs, and child development, giving

¹¹ Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses UK)

preference to the parents of the child vulnerable witness, if qualified. The guardian *ad litem* may be a member of bar practicing advocate, except a person who is a witness in any proceeding involving the vulnerable witness.

16. Duties of guardian *ad litem*:

It shall be the duty of the guardian *ad litem* so appointed by court to:

- (i) attend all depositions, hearings, and trial proceedings in which a vulnerable witness participates.
- (ii) make recommendations to the court concerning the welfare of the vulnerable witness keeping in view the needs of the child and observing the impact of the proceedings on the child.
- (iii) explain in a language understandable to the vulnerable witness, all legal proceedings, including police investigations, in which the child is involved;
- (iv) assist the vulnerable witness and his family in coping with the emotional effects of crime and subsequent criminal or non-criminal proceedings in which the child is involved;
- (v) remain with the vulnerable witness while the vulnerable witness waits to testify.

17. Legal assistance

A vulnerable witness may be provided with legal assistance by the court, if the court considers the assignment of a lawyer to be in the best interests of the vulnerable witness, throughout the justice process in the following instances:

- (a) at the request of the support person, if one has been designated;
- (b) pursuant to an order of the court on its own motion.

18. Court to allow presence of support persons

- a) A court shall allow *suo motu* or on request, verbal or written, to child testifying at a judicial proceeding to have the presence of one person of his own choice to provide him support who shall within the view and if the need arise may accompany the child to the witness stand, provided that such support person shall not completely obscure the child from the view of the opposing party or the judge.
- b) The court may allow the support person to take other appropriate steps to provide emotional support to the vulnerable witness in the course of the proceedings.
- c) The court shall instruct the support persons not to prompt, sway, or influence the vulnerable witness during his testimony. The support person shall also be directed that he/she shall in no circumstances discuss the evidence to be given by the vulnerable witness.

- d) Where no other suitable person is available only in very rare cases should another witness in the case be appointed as a support person. The court shall ordinarily appoint a neutral person, other than a parent, as a support person. It is only in exceptional circumstances keeping the condition of the vulnerable witness in mind, that the court should appoint a parent as a support person.

19. The testimony of support person to be recorded prior:

A testimony of such support person if he also happens to be a witness shall be recorded, ahead of the testimony of the child.

20. Court to appoint facilitator:

- (i) To assist the vulnerable witnesses in effectively communicating at various stages of trial and or to coordinate with the other stake holders such as police, medical officer, prosecutors, psychologists, defence counsel and courts, the court shall allow use of facilitators.
- (ii) The court may, suo motu or upon an application presented by either party or a support person of vulnerable witnesses appoint a facilitator if it determines that such witness is finding it difficult to understand or respond to questions asked.

Explanation: (i) The facilitator may be an *interpreter, a translator*, child and general psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, guidance counselor, teacher, parent, or relative of such witness who shall be under oath to pose questions according to meaning intended by the counsel.

(ii) If the court appoints a facilitator, the respective counsel for the parties shall pose questions to the vulnerable witness only through the facilitator, either in the words used by counsel or, if the vulnerable witness is not likely to understand the same, in words or by such mode as is comprehensible to the vulnerable witness and which convey the meaning intended by counsel.

21. Right to be informed:

A vulnerable witness, his or her parents or guardian, his or her lawyer, the support person, if designated, or other appropriate person designated to provide assistance shall, from their first contact with the court process and throughout that process, be promptly informed by the Court about the stage of the process and, to the extent feasible and appropriate, about the following:

- (a) procedures of the criminal justice process including the role of vulnerable witnesses, the importance, timing and manner of testimony, and the ways in which proceedings will be conducted during the trial;

- (b) existing support mechanisms for a vulnerable witness when participating in proceedings, including making available appropriate person designated to provide assistance;
- (c) specific time and places of hearings and other relevant events;
- (d) availability of protective measures;
- (e) relevant rights of child victims and witnesses pursuant to applicable laws, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international legal instruments, including the Guidelines and the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 40/34 of 29 November 1985;
- (f) the progress and disposition of the specific case, including the apprehension, arrest and custodial status of the accused and any pending changes to that status, the prosecutorial decision and relevant post-trial developments and the outcome of the case.

22. Language, interpreter and other special assistance measures:

- i. the court shall ensure that proceedings relevant to the testimony of a child victim or vulnerable witness are conducted in language that is simple and comprehensible to a child.
- ii. if a vulnerable witness needs the assistance of interpretation into a language or mode that the child understands, an interpreter shall be provided free of charge.
- iii. if, in view of the child's age, level of maturity or special individual needs, which may include but are not limited to disabilities if any, ethnicity, poverty or risk of re victimization, the vulnerable witness requires special assistance measures in order to testify or participate in the justice process, such measures shall be provided free of charge.

23. Waiting area for vulnerable witness:

The courts shall ensure that a waiting area for vulnerable witnesses with the support person, lawyer of the witness facilitation, if any, is separate from waiting areas used by other persons. The waiting area for vulnerable witnesses should be furnished so as to make a vulnerable witness comfortable.

24. Duty to provide comfortable environment:

It shall be the duty of the court to ensure comfortable environment for the vulnerable witness by issuing directions and also by supervising, the location, movement and deportment of all persons in the courtroom including the parties, their counsel, vulnerable witness, support persons, guardian ad litem, facilitator, and court personnel. The child vulnerable witness may be allowed to testify from a place other than the witness chair. The witness chair or other place from which the child vulnerable witness testifies may be turned to facilitate his testimony but

the opposing party and his counsel must have a frontal or profile view of the child even by a video link, during the testimony of the child vulnerable witness. The witness chair or other place from which the child vulnerable witness testifies may also be rearranged to allow the child to see the opposing party and his counsel, if he chooses to look at them, without turning his body or leaving the witness stand. While deciding to make available such environment, the judge may be dispensed with from wearing his judicial robes¹².

25. Testimony during appropriate hours:

The court may order that the testimony of the vulnerable witness should be taken during a time of day when the vulnerable witness is well-rested.

26. Measures to protect the privacy and well-being of child victims and witnesses:

(1) At the request of a child victim or vulnerable witness, his or her parents or guardian, his or her lawyer, the support person, other appropriate person designated to provide assistance, or the court on its own motion, taking into account the best interests of the child, may order one or more of the following measures to protect the privacy and physical and mental well-being of the vulnerable witness child and to prevent undue distress and secondary victimization:

- (a) expunging from the public record any names, addresses, workplaces, professions or any other information that could be used to identify the vulnerable witness;
- (b) forbidding the defence lawyer and persons present in court room from revealing the identity of the vulnerable witness or disclosing any material or information that would tend to identify the child vulnerable witness;
- (c) ordering the non-disclosure of any records that identify the vulnerable witness, until such time as the court may find appropriate;
- (d) assigning a pseudonym or a number to a child, in which case the full name and date of birth of the vulnerable witness shall be revealed to the accused within a reasonable period for the preparation of his or her defence;
- (e) efforts to conceal the features or physical description of the vulnerable witness giving testimony or to prevent distress or harm to the child vulnerable witness, including testifying:
 - (i) behind screen;
 - (ii) using image- or voice-altering devices;
 - (iii) through examination in another place, transmitted simultaneously to the courtroom by means of video link;

¹² Virender Vs. State of NCT Delhi – decided by Hon’ble Delhi High Court in Crl. A. No. 121/2008 dt. 29.09.09

- (iv) through a qualified and suitable intermediary, such as, but not limited to, an interpreter for children with hearing, sight, speech or other disabilities;
- (f) holding closed sessions;
- (g) taking any other measure that the court may deem necessary, including, where applicable, anonymity, taking into account the best interests of the child and the rights of the accused.

(2) Any information including name, parentage, age, address, etc. revealed by the vulnerable witness which enables identification of the person of the vulnerable witness, shall be kept in a sealed cover on the record and shall not be made available for inspection to any party or person. Certified copies thereof shall also not be issued. The reference to the child victim or witness shall be only by the pseudonym assigned in the case.

27. Directions for Criminal Court Judges:

- (i) Vulnerable witnesses shall receive high priority and shall be handled as expeditiously as possible, minimizing unnecessary delays and continuances. (Whenever necessary and possible, the court schedule will be altered to ensure that the testimony of the child victim or vulnerable witness is recorded on sequential days, without delays.)
- (ii) Judges and court administrators should ensure that the developmental needs of vulnerable witnesses are recognized and accommodated in the arrangement of the courtroom.
- (iii) separate and safe waiting areas and passage thereto should be provided for vulnerable witnesses.
- (iv) judges should ensure that the developmental stages and needs of vulnerable witnesses are identified recognized and addressed throughout the court process by requiring usage of appropriate language, by timing hearings and testimony to meet the attention span and physical needs of such vulnerable witnesses by allowing the use of testimonial aids as well as interpreters, translators, when necessary
- (v) hearings involving a vulnerable witness may be scheduled on days/time when the witness is not inconvenienced or is not disruptive to routine/regular schedule of child.

28. Allowing proceedings to be conducted in camera:

- (i) When a vulnerable witness testifies, the court may order the exclusion from the courtroom of all persons, who do not have a direct interest in the case including members of the press. Such an order may be made to protect the right to privacy of the vulnerable witness or if the court determines on the record that requiring the vulnerable witness to testify in open court would

- cause psychological harm to him, hinder the ascertainment of truth, or result in his inability to effectively communicate due to embarrassment, fear, or timidity.
- (ii) In making its order, the court shall consider the developmental level of the vulnerable witness, the nature of the crime, the nature of his testimony regarding the crime, his relationship to the accused and to persons attending the trial, his desires, and the interests of his parents or legal guardian.
- (iii) The court may, *motu proprio*, exclude the public from the courtroom if the evidence to be produced during trial is of such character as to be distressing, personal, offensive to decency or public morals.

29. Live-link television testimony in criminal cases where the vulnerable witness is involved –

- (a) In order to take a decision of usage of a live-link the judge may question the child vulnerable witness in chambers, or in some comfortable place other than the courtroom, in the presence of the support person, guardian ad litem, prosecutor, and counsel for the parties. The questions of the judge shall not be related to the issues at trial but to the feelings of the child about testifying in the courtroom.
- (b) The court on its own motion, if deemed appropriate, may pass orders in terms of (a) or any other suitable directions for recording the evidence of a vulnerable witness.

30. Provision of screens, one-way mirrors, and other devices to vulnerable witness from accused:

The court may suo motu or on an application made even by the prosecutor or the guardian ad litem may order that the chair of the vulnerable witness or that a screen or other device be placed in the courtroom in such a manner that the child cannot see the accused while testifying. The court shall issue an order stating the reasons and describing the approved courtroom arrangement

31. Factors to be considered while considering the application under Guideline 29:

The order granting or denying the use of live-link television shall state the reasons therefore and shall consider the following:

- (i) the age and level of development of the vulnerable witness;
- (ii) his/her physical and mental health, including any mental or physical disability;
- (iii) any physical, emotional, or psychological harm related to the case on hand or trauma experienced by the child;
- (iv) the nature of the alleged offence and circumstances of its commission;

- (v) any threats against the vulnerable witness;
- (vi) his/her relationship with the accused or adverse party;
- (vii) his/her reaction to any prior encounters with the accused in court or elsewhere;
- (viii) his reaction prior to trial when the topic of testifying was discussed with him by parents or professionals;
- (ix) specific symptoms of stress exhibited by the vulnerable witness in the days prior to testifying;
- (x) testimony of expert or lay witnesses;
- (xi) the custodial situation of the child and the attitude of the members of his/her family regarding the events about which he will testify; and
- (xii) other relevant factors, such as court atmosphere and formalities of court procedure.

32. Mode of questioning:

To facilitate the ascertainment of the truth the court shall exercise control over the questioning of vulnerable witness.

- (i) ensure that questions are stated in a form appropriate to the developmental level of the vulnerable witness;
 - (ii) protect vulnerable witness from harassment or undue embarrassment; and
 - (iii) avoid waste of time by declining questions which the court considers unacceptable due to their being improper, unfair, misleading, needless, repetitive or expressed in language that is too complicated for the witness to understand.
- (iv) the court may allow the child witness to testify in a narrative form.

33. Rules of deposition to be explained to the Witnesses:

The court shall explain to a vulnerable witness to listen carefully to the questions and to tell the whole truth, by speaking loudly and not to respond by shaking head in yes or no and also to specifically state that the witness does not remember where he has forgotten something and to clearly ask when the question is not understood.

A gesture by a vulnerable witness to explain what had happened shall be appropriately translated and recorded in the child's deposition.

34. Objections to questions:

Objections to questions should be couched in a manner so as not to mislead, confuse, frighten a vulnerable witness.

35. Allow questions in simple language:

The court to allow the questions to be put in simple language avoiding slang, esoteric jargon, proverbs, metaphors and acronyms. The court must not allow the question carrying words capable of two-three meanings, questions having use of both past and present in one sentence, or multiple questions which is likely to confuse a witness. Where the witness seems confused instead of repetition of the same question, the court should direct for its re-phrasing.

Explanation: (i) The reaction of vulnerable witness shall be treated as sufficient clue that question was not clear so it shall be rephrased and put to the witness in a different way.

(ii) Given the witness developmental level, excessively long questions shall be required to be rephrased and thereafter put to witness.

(iii) Questions framed as compound or complex sentence structure; or two part questions or those containing double negatives shall be rephrased and thereafter put to witness.

36. Protection of privacy and safety:

(a) **Confidentiality of records-** Any record regarding a vulnerable witness shall be confidential and kept under seal. Except upon written request and order of the court, the record shall only be made available to the following:

- (i) Members of the court staff for administrative use;
- (ii) The Public Prosecutor for inspection;
- (iii) Defence counsel for inspection;
- (iv) The guardian ad litem for inspection;
- (v) Other persons as determined by the court.

(b) **Protective order.-** The depositions of the vulnerable witness recorded by video link shall be video recorded except under reasoned order requiring the special measures by the judge. However where any videotape or audiotape of a vulnerable witness is made, it shall be under a protective order that provides as follows:

- (i) A transcript of the testimony of the vulnerable witness shall be prepared and maintained on record of the case. Copies of such transcript shall be furnished to the parties of the case.
- (ii) Tapes may be viewed only by parties, their counsel, their expert witness, and the guardian ad litem.
- (iii) No person shall be granted access to the tape, or any part thereof unless he signs a written affirmation that he has received and read a copy of the protective order; that he submits to the jurisdiction of the court with

respect to the protective order; and that in case of violation thereof, he will be subject to the contempt power of the court.

(iv) Each of the tapes, if made available to the parties or their counsel, shall bear the following cautionary notice:

- This object or document and the contents thereof are subject to a protective order issued by the court in (case title), (case number). They shall not be examined, inspected, read, viewed, or copied by any person, or disclosed to any person, except as provided in the protective order. No additional copies of the tape or any of its portion shall be made, given, sold, or shown to any person without prior court order. Any person violating such protective order is subject to the contempt power of the court and other penalties prescribed by law”.

(v) No tape shall be given, loaned, sold, or shown to any person except as ordered by the court.

(vi) This protective order shall remain in full force and effect until further order of the court.

(c) Personal details during evidence likely to cause threat to physical safety of vulnerable witness to be excluded - A vulnerable witness has a right at any court proceeding not to testify regarding personal identifying information, including his name, address, telephone number, school, and other information that could endanger his physical safety or his family. The court may, however, require the vulnerable witness to testify regarding personal identifying information in the interest of justice.

(d) Destruction of videotapes and audiotapes - Any videotape or audiotape of a child produced under the provisions of these guidelines or otherwise made part of the court record shall be destroyed as per rules formed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

37. Protective measures:

At any stage in the justice process where the safety of a child victim or witness is deemed to be at risk, the court shall arrange to have protective measures put in place for the child. Those measures may include the following:

- (a) avoiding direct or indirect contact between a vulnerable witness and the accused at any point in the justice process;
- (b) restraint orders;

- (c) a pretrial detention order for the accused or with restraint or "no contact" bail conditions which may be continued during trial;
- (d) protection for a child victim or vulnerable witness by the police or other relevant agencies and safeguarding the whereabouts of the child vulnerable witness from disclosure;
- (e) any other protective measures that may be deemed appropriate.

38. Standard Operating Procedure to be followed during virtual examination of child witnesses-

Judges shall ensure that the Standard Operating Procedure affirmed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in *In Re Children in Street Situation*¹³ is adhered to in all criminal trials where the child witness does not reside near the court where the trial is conducted and where the child witness is examined virtual, not physically, by the court in which the trial is conducted.

39. Establishment of Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre-

(i) In every District Court establishment (or additional Sessions Court establishment), there shall be a permanent Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre (VWDC).

(ii) The VWDC shall be equipped with features and functionalities as mentioned in the Prototype Drawings and Guidelines as prepared under the directions of Hon'ble Ms. Justice Gita Mittal, the Chairperson of the Vulnerable Witness Committee constituted by the Supreme Court vide order dated 11.01.2022 in *Smruti Tukaram Badade Vs State of Maharashtra and Another* (Crl.App.No.1101/2019).

(iii) The use of VWDCs should, in addition to criminal cases, be allowed for other jurisdictions, including, civil jurisdictions, family courts, juvenile justice boards and Childrens' courts. Permission should be granted for recording the evidence of vulnerable witnesses in cases across all jurisdictions.

40. Interim arrangement:

Till a permanent Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre is established and made functional, an Exclusive Courtroom be prepared/ identified in every District Court establishment (or Additional Sessions Court establishment) well connected to the Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre, to be established preferably at ADR Centre, through Video Conferencing System/ Audio - Video Linkage for smooth and proper recording of deposition of the Vulnerable Witnesses.

¹³ 2022 SCC Online SC 189

41. Booking of slot for examination of Vulnerable Witnesses in Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre:

On receipt of requisitions from different Courts relating to the examination of Vulnerable Witnesses in the Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre, the Officer-in-charge of the VWDC shall book date and time for such examination, enter the slot booking in a register to be maintained by him and communicate the same to the concerned Courts well in advance.

42. Manpower required for smooth and efficient running of Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre:

(a) Officer-in-charge: Officer-in-charge shall be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the High Court in every District Court establishment (or Additional Sessions Court establishment) on adhoc/ contract/ temporary/ permanent basis and he shall ensure management and regulation of the affairs of the VWDC including keeping and maintaining of Records and Data etc.

Till the said arrangement be made, the Secretary, District Legal Services Authority shall function as Officer-in-charge of the V.W.D.C.

(b) Technical Assistant-cum-coordinator: Technical Assistant shall be appointed by the State Government in consultation with the High Court in every District Court establishment (or Additional Sessions Court establishment) on adhoc/ contract/ temporary/ permanent basis who shall apart from providing technical support at all ends in smooth and effective running of the VWDC shall assist the Officer-in-charge of the VWDC in managing and regulating the affairs of the VWDC.

Till the said arrangement be made, the System Officer/ System Assistant/ District System Administrator shall function as Technical Assistant of the V.W.D.C.

43. Review and Monitoring:

The implementation of the guidelines shall be reviewed annually and for this purpose the High Court shall engage independent research bodies or organization, reputed academic institutions or Universities or constitute a multi-disciplinary Committee including experts having the experience of working with vulnerable witnesses. The recommendations received shall be promptly acted upon and the guidelines may also be updated based on relevant legal developments.

44. Residual Provisions:

Matters concerning for which no provision is made in these Guidelines shall be decided by the Court consistent with the interest of the Vulnerable Witnesses without prejudice to the rights of the accused to a fair trial.

Y. LAKSHMANA RAO,
FAC. Registrar General.

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